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49,806 Dental Exams and Counting

Filed under UNCATEGORIZED

[NO COMMENTS]

By Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Milas Sturdivant, Branch Health Clinic Parris Island, S.C.



Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Milas Sturdivant checks in with one his departmental leading petty officers to ensure clinic operations are running smoothly at Branch Health Clinic Parris Island, S.C. (Photo by Regena Kowitz)

Dental Services at Branch Health Clinic Parris Island, S.C., has seen 49,806 patients so far this year. As the Leading Petty Officer for one of the Navy’s largest dental treatment facilities, every day brings its own unique adventures and challenges. When I arrive at my office at 6 a.m., there will already be items on my desk that need attention prior to morning quarters at 6:45 a.m.; hit lists, taskings from my chief, people going SIQ. It’s inevitable when you are the supervisor for 66 junior enlisted Sailors, not to mention over 120 officers and civilian personnel also assigned dental.

I head upstairs for quarters with a myriad of things to pass; training requirements, reminders about award presentations, reenlistments, readiness items, and upcoming inspections. After muster is over, a Sailor comes up to me like clockwork needing advice on their orders, a financial problem, or a personal issue. I give them the time and attention they need, making a note to back-fill the chief in case she may need to get involved in the future.

As I start my rounds to the nine departments that comprise dental services, I always make my way to the Recruit In-processing Facility (RIF) first. The 16 Sailors who work here weren’t able to attend morning quarters. They have been at work since 4:45 a.m. preparing for the 237 Marine Corps recruits who will be coming to see them today, a small portion of the 20,000 plus recruits who come through Parris Island each year. These recruits have only been in training a few days, if not hours, and need complete dental examinations with radiographs, dental records established, and initial screenings completed. This department is where it all starts. Every time a recruit comes back to the dental clinic it is because of a treatment need which was identified in RIF. As always, it amazes me how professional and thorough these young Sailors are, most of whom have been in the Navy less than two years.

I start back to the main clinic, heading upstairs to General Dentistry, which is well on their way to treating the 80 patients they’ll see today. I stop in and talk to that department’s lead petty officer, ensuring he has everything he needs for the day. On top of the day-to-day running of the largest department in the clinic with over 60 staff, he’s also charged with the training of all our newest active duty dental assistants, six of whom just checked in, fresh out

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of training. They will be assigned to the General Dentistry department for approximately 30 days, where we will orient, train, and mentor them to make sure they’re starting off on the right track for a successful tour as a dental technician and as a Sailor.

Next stop on my list is the Oral Surgery department. The 10 active duty and civilian dental assistants assigned here are busy prepping and educating the first round of patients that the six doctors will see. Throughout the day, the department will have turned over their six operatories a minimum of 10 times, taking care of the 60-70 recruit patients requiring tooth extractions as determined from their initial treatment plan from RIF.

Making my way down the stairs to the front desk, it’s now well into the morning, and it hits me that time is just flying by and it will soon be time to negotiate the lunch break rotations for our over 50 civilian dental assistants. The staff there is waiting for me, they’ve already had a couple of active duty patients fail to make their scheduled appointments, and one is a repeat offender. As I look through his record, I see four previous failures. When patients fail to show at their dental appointments, not only does it waste the dentist’s and assistant’s time, it takes away from other patients who could have been booked in their place and ultimately, could contribute to decreased operational dental readiness (ODR). I’ll take this one to chief and let her call the chain of command. We take pride in maintaining a high ODR for both recruits and active duty patients in our charge.

As I finally make my way back to my office, I prepare to attend to the endless paperwork, visits by departmental LPOs and taskings from chief and my director. At 4:30 p.m., I finish up what I’m working on, log off my computer and get ready to leave. On my way out the door, I hear the inevitable “HM1, do you have a second?” Stopping to address the issue, it occurs to me that it was a great day, and I can’t wait to do it all over again in the morning.

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